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For further information about this booklet contact Charles Hobbs, editor, News Division, Office of Public Affairs, Room 406-A, U.S Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250 or call (202) 720-4026.

Statement-

Release No. 0201.94
Steve Kinsella (202) 720-4623

by
SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE MIKE ESPY
ON THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION
AND FORESTRY'S MARKUP OF USDA'S REORGANIZATION MEASURE

March 9, 1994

"The Senate's action means that for the first time since its inception by President Abraham Lincoln over 100 years ago, we are moving toward a significant reorganization of the Department of Agriculture that will downsize its structure, make its mission more responsive to its constituencies and save the American taxpayer real dollars.

"On behalf of President Clinton and Vice President Gore, I applaud Senators Leahy and Lugar for their leadership in moving this measure forward. This markup, and the recent markup in the House of Representatives subcommittee, demonstrates to the American public that reinventing government and streamlining are not just slogans but a concrete effort to change the way the government does business."



News Releases-

Release No. 0189.94
Larry Mark (202) 720-3310
Susan Conley (202) 720-5025

USDA'S MEAT AND POULTRY HOTLINE: A LINK BETWEEN NUTRITION, FITNESS AND FOOD SAFETY

WASHINGTON, March 7--March is National Nutrition Month, and USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline is joining in the observance.

"This is our third year of responding to calls concerning nutrition questions on our nationwide, toll-free Hotline," says Susan Conley, director of the Hotline.

Launched in 1985 to help consumers with food safety and handling questions about meat and poultry products, the Hotline began answering nutrition questions as well in October 1991. The Hotline, in cooperation with other government agencies, serves as an important link between the areas of nutrition, fitness and food safety.

Many people calling the Hotline with nutrition questions also reveal potentially unsafe food practices. "For example, raw eggs added to shakes or blended juices do provide extra protein to the diet," Conley explained, "but it is also possible to introduce Salmonella enteritidis, a foodborne pathogen that could make people sick. Eating undercooked or raw eggs, meat and poultry can cause illness."

About four percent of the some 131,000 calls to the Hotline each year relate to nutrition issues. Common concerns include the fat and cholesterol content of meat and poultry products; the nutritional differences between cooking chicken with or without the skin, and the nutritional benefits, if any, of eating raw rather than cooked meat. "This is clearly a food safety issue," said Conley.

With more food packages now carrying the new nutrition label, the Hotline staff also helps consumers better understand the new labels.

"The Hotline fully supports the American Dietetic Association's 'Eat Right America' campaign," says Conley. "Registered dietitians and home economists will continue to respond to consumers' food safety and nutrition questions, not only during National Nutrition Month, but year-round as well."

The Meat and Poultry Hotline can be reached at 1-800-535-4555. In the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area, the number is (202) 720-3333.



Release No. 0190.94
Ed Curlett (301) 436-3256
Larry Mark (202) 720-3310

USDA ENDING QUARANTINE ON CANADIAN SEED POTATOES

WASHINGTON, March 7--The U.S. Department of Agriculture is removing a federal quarantine on Canadian seed potatoes that was imposed to stop the spread of the necrotic strain of potato virus Y (PVYn) based on the imposition of a certification program.

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is ending the quarantine because of an agreement with Canada to prevent the spread of PVYn by means of a seed potato certification program. The program is called the Canada/United States PVYn Management Plan.

"The implementation of this plan will protect U.S. agriculture from potential risks imposed by PVYn, making federal regulations that apply to Canada with respect to PVYn unnecessary," said B. Glen Lee, deputy administrator of APHIS's plant protection and quarantine.

The management plan calls for testing Canadian seed potatoes for PVYn in early generations and mandates the removal of infected seedlots from seed potato production.

Copies of the plan may be obtained by writing James Petit de Mange, operations officer, Port Operations Staff, PPQ, APHIS, USDA, Room 632 Federal Building, 6505 Belcrest Road, Hyattsville, Md. 20782.

The new regulation was announced as a final rule in the March 2 Federal Register.



Release No. 0191.94
Clarence Steinberg (202) 720-6179
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USDA SEEKS COMMENT ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO MIDDLE ATLANTIC FEDERAL MILK MARKETING ORDER

WASHINGTON, March 7--The U.S. Department of Agriculture is inviting dairy farmers, milk cooperative associations, milk handlers (shippers) and consumers to testify at a hearing on proposals to amend the Middle Atlantic federal milk marketing order.

The hearing will begin on May 2 at 9 a.m., at the Holiday Inn-Independence Mall, 400 Arch Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

Lon Hatamiya, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said a federation of dairy producer cooperatives, which requested the hearing, proposes to amend the order's "pooling" provisions. At issue are the rules for amounts of milk its members must deliver or distribute under the order to be eligible to receive the order's benefits, he said.

The Middle Atlantic milk marketing order affects northern Virginia, eastern Maryland, southeastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, southern New Jersey, and the District of Columbia.

Details of the hearing were published as a notice in the March 4 Federal Register. Copies of the notice are available from Rex F. Lothrop, Market Administrator, Suite 200 Essex Building, 333 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Va. 22314, or USDA, AMS, Dairy Division, Order Formulation Branch, Rm. 2971-So. Bldg., P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C. 20090-6456, tel. (202) 720-7183, FAX (202) 720-4844.



Release No. 0195.94
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CONCERN ABOUT HUNGER IN AMERICA BRINGS OVER 300 PEOPLE TO USDA FORUM

WASHINGTON, March 8--More than 300 people from seven states came to a USDA regional hunger forum yesterday in Kansas City, Mo. to talk about hunger in their communities.

"Hunger is one of the most haunting problems facing our country today," said Shirley Watkins, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Food and Consumer Services at the Department of Agriculture. "We are here to listen to your problems and find solutions."

Panelists and audience members at the forum included advocates, health officials, nutritionists, students, and people who experience hunger in their daily lives.

Forum co-chair, U.S. Rep. Alan Wheat (D-Mo.), whose district includes Kansas City, told the audience, "Now is the time to act to solve the lingering problems of hunger in this country. Today we can send a strong message: It's not enough to care. We also have to act."

Aquanette Babalola participates in the University of Missouri's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), which she called "a blessing in disguise." As a child living with her disabled grandmother, Aquanette learned to "prepare nutritious meals, to shop on a fixed budget, to use a recipe, and to prepare a grocery list" through EFNEP instruction.

The forum was held at Harvesters: The Community Food Network in Kansas City. Harvesters provides food to 417 not-for-profit agencies in the Kansas City area. Executive Director Judy Perry urged USDA to consolidate food assistance programs to maximize food resources and reduce duplication of efforts. In 1993, Harvesters distributed 13.6 million pounds of food and related products in the Kansas City area.

The forum in Kansas City is the third in a series of regional forums to focus on regional obstacles and solutions in the fight against hunger in America's communities. In June, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy convened the National Hunger Forum in Washington, D.C. That conference brought together the largest and most distinguished group since the White House Conference nearly 25 years ago. Previous regional forums were held in Burlington, Vt., and McAllen, Texas. The final forum will be held April 22 in Dayton, Ohio.



Release No. 0197.94
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 Mary Dixon (202) 720-4623

USDA E. COLI DAIRY CALF STUDY POINTS TO NEED FOR CHANGES IN HERD MANAGEMENT

WASHINGTON, March 8--The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today that a recently completed one-year study indicates that herd management practices may have an impact on the prevalence of the pathogen E. coli 0157:H7 in dairy herds.

"This finding is valuable and could point to ways to lower the levels of E. coli 0157:H7 in cattle and thus reduce the incidence of food poisoning and related diseases in humans," said Patricia Jensen, acting assistant secretary for marketing and inspection services.

Cattle shed the E. coli 0157:H7 organism in their feces, which can contaminate the environment and expose other animals. Although cattle carry and shed the bacteria without becoming ill, human illnesses associated with E. coli 0157:H7 can include bloody diarrhea and hemorrhagic uremic syndrome, a serious kidney disease and the leading cause of acute kidney failure in children. Sources of human infection vary, but many documented outbreaks of disease have been traced to undercooked beef. Humans can become exposed through consuming contaminated undercooked meat, untreated water or unpasteurized milk or materials cross contaminated with these products. Person-to-person transmission is also an important source of secondary infections in humans.

Jensen said the dairy heifer study, conducted by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, is only one of a number of efforts by the department to improve the safety of meat and poultry

products. "Over the past year," she said, "we have initiated a strategic pathogen reduction program that aims to reduce microbial contamination from the farm to the table."

The study that APHIS conducted through its National Animal Health Monitoring System followed newborn calves to the weaning stage. The study included 1,811 dairy operations in 28 states. Fecal samples collected from about 7,000 preweaned calves from over 1,000 dairy operations were tested for presence of the pathogen.

Samples from 25 of these calves from 19 farms in 16 states tested positive for the organism, for a prevalence of 3.6 per 1,000 calves. Farms with positive test results were spread across the country, and no regional or seasonal clustering was found.

The project next conducted a follow-up study on 64 of the study herds to look at shedding patterns (expelling the organism in feces) in infected herds and to determine management factors that might be associated with infection. An increase in prevalence was identified at 8 weeks of age, the average age at which calves were weaned. Weaned calves were three times more likely to test positive than calves still nursing their mothers.

The study found that if calves were grouped before weaning, the herd was nine times more likely to test positive than if they were grouped after weaning. This indicates that grouping calves before weaning may increase transmission of *E. coli* to other calves or precipitate shedding of the pathogen in calves already carrying it in their systems.

Jensen said USDA's food safety emphasis last year was on enforcement and on developing a science-based inspection system. She said food safety improvements have included special unannounced reviews of meat and poultry plants, which resulted in temporarily stopping activities at several plants; mandating and improving training on zero tolerance for fecal matter on beef carcasses; increased research from the farm to the table to develop methods to detect and destroy pathogens, as well as new inspection methods based on sound science; rapid bacteria test research; and the hiring of 200 additional inspectors in the Food Safety and Inspection Service and an additional 200 in the fiscal 1995 budget.

"We are in the process of issuing a final rule mandating safe cooking and handling labels for raw and partially cooked meat and poultry products," Jensen noted. "USDA also is engaged in a broad range of cooperative efforts with the states and with other federal agencies to enhance food safety. Currently, more than 70 pathogen reduction activities are underway."



Release No. 0202.94

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Mary Dixon (202) 720-4623

ESPY ANNOUNCES PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE POULTRY INSPECTION SYSTEM

WASHINGTON, March 9 -- Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy today announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture will further enhance and strengthen the poultry inspection system to include microbial testing and the prohibition of all fecal matter on raw product.

"We have made improving the meat and poultry inspection system at USDA a top priority and today's announcement is another move in that direction," said Espy. "We are taking steps to further incorporate science and modernize the nation's meat and poultry system."

The secretary's poultry initiative includes several major changes that will be proposed in the Federal Register.

Today's proposal includes:

- ◆ No amount of fecal matter will be allowed on raw product. This will formalize the policy in regulation. When Espy came to office he reinforced this policy for red meat and directed the Food Safety and Inspection Service to draft a similar proposal for poultry. Fecal matter will no longer be acceptable as part of a finished product standard.

- ◆ Regular microbial testing will be mandated on a statistical sampling of product. This will further incorporate science into the system.

- ◆ Industry will be required to use FDA-approved rinses that reduce overall bacterial levels on raw product. As more compounds are developed and given FDA approval, immediate use will be allowed.

◆ A part of the inspection sequence will be changed. Currently, the initial inspection of the poultry carcasses is before the internal organs are removed. Today's proposal calls for the inspection to take place before and after the internal organs are removed. This will ensure that the carcasses are examined after a key point of potential contamination (organ removal) and before the chiller.

◆ Fecal-contaminated poultry carcasses will be allowed to be washed inside and outside, rather than trimmed, if removal is effective; however, all birds will be re-inspected after reprocessing rather than a sampling. This move is based on a 1993 study which reconfirms the efficacy of washing.

◆ Steps will be taken to reduce stress on inspectors and the risk of repetitive motion trauma.

Since coming to office in January 1993, Espy has made several major improvements to the meat and poultry inspection system, including launching unannounced reviews of plants, hiring additional inspectors, accelerating research on microbial testing and moving toward mandating safe cooking and handling labels for raw meat and poultry.



Release No. 0210.94

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USDA CONTINUES SPECIAL REVIEWS OF MEAT AND POULTRY PLANTS

WASHINGTON, March 11 -- As part of the continuing review on meat and poultry plants around the nation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service has released a follow-up report on 79 plants previously identified as having serious deficiencies. The report notes that FSIS enhanced enforcement is helping to improve plants. In September, 58 plants had improved and 21 plants received accelerated deficiency notices. Further, reviews were conducted in the 21 plants with only seven repeat accelerated deficiency notices being issued.

"The report issued is part of the unannounced reviews of 1,000 plants and USDA's continuing effort to strengthen enforcement of its regulations in the nation's meat and poultry plants," said Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy, who has made improving the meat and poultry inspection system a primary objective of USDA. "Our special review team is working throughout the nation, and we feel strongly that we are making a difference. We are sending a clear message that our inspectors will continue to aggressively work to hold plants to the highest standards."

The reviews in the report took place in September and follow-up visits took place from November through January. Observations observed by the review team ranged from poor lighting, to rodent and pest infestation to contaminated product. A plant receives an accelerated deficiency notice when the review team observes a serious loss of process control and product adulteration.

Two of the 21 plants reviewed and which received accelerated deficiency notices, Ben Kezar Wholesale Meats of Grantham, N.H., and Brown's Meat Plant of Troy, Tenn., have withdrawn from the federal inspection system.

Of the 21 plants given a second review between December and January, the seven plants receiving repeat accelerated deficiency notices were:

Ben's Foodliner of Rock Springs, Wyo. (flaking paint on plant equipment and rodent droppings in storage rooms); California Smokehouse Foods Inc. of Lodi, Calif. (unclean cutting boards, unacceptable employee product handling practices, retainment of contaminated product and use of incorrect labeling statements); Conti Packing Co. Inc. of Henrietta, N.Y. (improper product handling, improper product storage, unacceptable employee product handling practices, retainment of contaminated product, and improper facility and equipment sanitation);

D.H. Johnson Ltd. of Bay City, Mich. (formerly Marshall-Collicker Packing) (improper facility and equipment sanitation, unacceptable employee product handling practices, and improper product storage and sanitation); Glazier Packing Co. Inc. of Potsdam, N.Y. (improper facility and equipment sanitation, and rodent droppings in dry storage rooms); Walt's Wholesale Meats of Woodland, Wash. (leaking pipes, flaking paint and improper sanitation above product areas, improper lighting, improper facility and equipment sanitation, improper carcass handling procedures, retainment of contaminated product, and improper package materials storage); and Winkler Meat Co. of Muleshoe, Texas (unclean cutting boards

and plant equipment, improper facility and equipment sanitation, insect infestation in storage areas, and improper product storage).

The release of today's report follows earlier reports issued by Espy which outlined observations found at plants by the special review team. The last report was issued Feb. 4 and cited the findings in 26 turkey plants. In 1993, Espy released a report on 90 beef plants.

Since coming to office in January, 1993, Espy has made improvements to the meat and poultry inspection system, including launching unannounced reviews of plants, hiring additional inspectors, accelerating research on microbial testing and moving toward mandating safe cooking and handling labels for raw meat and poultry.

(Copies of the report can be obtained by calling (202) 720-4623.)



Release No. 0212.94
Robert Feist (202) 720-6789

1993-CROP FEED GRAINS NOT ELIGIBLE TO ENTER FARMER-OWNED RESERVE

WASHINGTON, March 11--Grant Buntrock, executive vice president of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation, today announced that 1993-crop feed grains will not be allowed to enter the farmer-owned reserve (FOR). "The statute prohibits entry when both market prices exceed the entry level and the stocks-to-use ratio is below the trigger requirement," Buntrock said. "Both conditions now exist, so the CCC does not have the authority to allow 1993-crop feed grains into the reserve."

As of Feb. 25, the 90-day average of corn prices was \$2.71 per bushel--well above the \$2./06 trigger level. Also, the estimated 1993/94 corn ending S/U is 0.101--well below the 0.225 S/U trigger level.



Release No. 0213.94
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SOYBEAN PRODUCERS TO CONTINUE PROMOTION AND RESEARCH PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, March 11--Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy has determined that the majority of soybean producers voting in a Feb. 9 national referendum voted to continue the National Soybean Promotion and Research Program.

Secretary Espy said program changes that the referendum puts into motion become effective April 1.

Lon Hatamiya, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, the agency with oversight responsibility for USDA research and promotion programs, said, "Of the 85,606 valid ballots cast, 46,060, or 53.8 percent favored the program and 39,546, or 46.2 percent, opposed continuing it."

AMS conducted the referendum with the assistance of the Cooperative Extension Service and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

"The law authorizing the program requires the majority of voting producers to support continuation of the program. Based on the results of the referendum, assessments of one half of one percent of the net market price of soybeans sold by producers will continue to be collected and used by the United Soybean Board and Qualified State Soybean Boards," Hatamiya said.

As a result of the continuation of the National Soybean Promotion and Research Program, the law which authorizes the program mandates changes in the way assessments are refunded:

--Refunds will be limited to 10 percent of total collections, on a state-by-state basis. Producers requesting refunds will receive a pro-rata share of their state's available funds up to the amount they paid into the fund.

--Refunds will no longer be paid on a monthly basis. Instead, they will be paid after the end of the respective qualified state soybean board's fiscal year.

Full refunds on assessments paid prior to April 1 will continue to be available, Hatamiya said.

Assessments generated under the program finance promotion, research and consumer information activities to strengthen the soybean industry's position in the marketplace. AMS monitors activities carried out under the act.

Notice of the determination of the national soybean referendum is scheduled to be published in the Federal Register in late March. For copies, contact Ralph Tapp, Chief, Research and Promotion Branch, Livestock and Seed Division, AMS, USDA, P.O. Box 96456, Room 2624 So. Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20090-6456; telephone (202) 720-1115.

State-by-state results of the soybean referendum are as follows:

<u>STATE</u>	<u>YES</u> <u>VOTES</u>	<u>NO</u> <u>VOTES</u>	<u>TOTAL</u> <u>VOTES</u>
Alabama	147	59	206
Arizona	4	0	4
Arkansas	1,002	550	1,552
California	3	0	3
Colorado	7	2	9
Delaware	158	100	258
Florida	24	11	35
Georgia	393	33	426
Hawaii	1	0	1
Illinois	7,813	12,864	20,677
Indiana	3,680	6,388	10,068
Iowa	8,237	6,129	14,366
Kansas	1,701	797	2,498
Kentucky	799	280	1,079
Louisiana	250	93	343
Maryland and District of Columbia	269	128	397
Massachusetts	1	0	1
Michigan	1,685	830	2,515
Minnesota	3,583	2,656	6,239
Mississippi	1,260	177	1,437
Missouri	2,982	1,933	4,915
Nebraska	2,615	1,929	4,544
New Jersey	48	21	69
New Mexico	1	0	1
New York	27	7	34
North Carolina	2,275	136	2,411
North Dakota	307	156	463
Ohio	2,818	2,711	5,529
Oklahoma	105	22	127
Pennsylvania	137	49	186
South Carolina	342	42	384
South Dakota	1,416	928	2,344
Tennessee	609	245	854
Texas	58	13	71
Vermont	1	0	1
Virginia	447	87	534
Washington	2	0	2
West Virginia	15	0	15
Wisconsin	838	170	1,008
Total	46,060	39,546	85,606

Note: No votes were cast in Alaska, Connecticut, Idaho, Maine, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Wyoming and Puerto Rico.



Program Announcements-

Release No. 0192.94
Robert Feist (202) 720-6789

STORAGE PAYMENTS RESUME FOR FARMER-OWNED-RESERVE WHEAT

WASHINGTON, March 7--Grant Buntrock, executive vice president of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation, today announced that storage payments on wheat in the farmer-owned-reserve (FOR) resumed March 2.

Buntrock said that "Despite the resumption in storage payments, producers may continue to market their FOR wheat."

Storage payments stopped Nov. 30, 1993 when the 5-day moving average price of the classes of wheat in the FOR reached 95 percent (\$3.80 per bushel) of the \$4.00 per bushel wheat target price. The nonstorage earning period continues until prices have been below the storage-stop trigger level for more than 90 consecutive days.

The last day on which the wheat market price equalled or exceeded 95 percent of the wheat target price was Dec. 1, 1993. Therefore, March 1 is the end of the nonstorage earning period and storage payments resume on March 2.

Storage payments are 26.5 cents per bushel, per year, paid at the end of each quarter. As of Feb. 15, 1994, 12.6 million bushels of 1990-crop wheat remained in the FOR.



Release No. 0193.94
Robert Feist (202) 720-6789

USDA EXTENDS ASSESSMENT DUE DATE ON IMPORTED TOBACCO

WASHINGTON, March 7 -- Grant Buntrock, executive vice president of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation, today announced that the original due date of March 10 for remittance of budget deficit marketing assessments and importer no-net-cost assessments on tobacco imported on or after January 1, 1994, will be extended until April 10, 1994.

These assessments, as applicable, are due on each pound of unmanufactured tobacco entered into the United States, Buntrock said.

USDA plans to publish shortly a rule finalizing a previously published interim rule which implements the provisions of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 relating to the budget deficit marketing assessment and the importer no-net-cost assessment prior to March 10, 1994.



Release No. 0199.94
Gene Rosera (202) 720-6734
Charles Hobbs (202) 720-4026

USDA ANNOUNCES PREVAILING WORLD MARKET RICE PRICES, MARKETING CERTIFICATE RATES

WASHINGTON, March 8--Under Secretary of Agriculture Eugene Moos today announced the prevailing world market prices of milled rice, loan rate basis, as follows:

- long grain whole kernels: 12.20 cents per pound
- medium grain whole kernels: 11.52 cents per pound
- short grain whole kernels: 11.38 cents per pound
- broken kernels: 6.10 cents per pound

Based upon these milled rice world market prices, loan deficiency payment rates, gains from repaying price support loans at the world market price, and marketing certificate rates are zero.

The prices announced are effective today at 3 p.m. EST. The next scheduled price announcement will be made March 15, at 3 p.m. EST.



Release No. 0209.94
Robert Feist (202) 720-6789

USDA SEEKS COMMENTS ON MALTING BARLEY ASSESSMENT RATE

WASHINGTON, March 11--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation is seeking comments on an amendment to regulations that change the malting barley assessment from 5 percent to 2.5 percent for the 1993 through 1995 crops of barley.

Grant Buntrock, CCC executive vice president, said the 2.5 percent assessment is based on the individual state's average malting barley price received by producers during the first five months of the barley marketing year, June 1-October 31. For those states for which an average malting barley price is not established, the 2.5 percent assessment is based on the national average malting barley price received by growers, Buntrock said.

The Agricultural Act of 1949, as amended, provides that the Secretary of Agriculture shall levy an assessment, up to 5 percent, on malting barley producers participating in the barley production adjustment program for each of the 1991-1995 crop years. The assessment was 5 percent for each of the 1991 and 1992 crops of barley.

The adjusted assessment will improve the competitive position of U.S. barley producers and reduce the distortions on barley marketings and production caused by the previous higher assessment, Buntrock said.

The 2.5 percent assessment became effective when published in the Federal Register March 7.

Comments must be received by April 6 to be considered and may either be FAXed to (202) 690-1346 or mailed to: Phil Sronce, Director, Grains Analysis Division, USDA/ASCS, Room 3742-S, P.O. Box 2415. All comments will be available for public inspection in Room 3740 in USDA's South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. during regular business hours.



Media Advisory-

Release No. 0204.94
Mike Hunst (202) 720-7017
Raymond L. Bridge (202) 720-5447

USDA REPORTS SCHEDULED FOR 8:30 A.M. ET RELEASE

WASHINGTON, March 10--The U.S. Department of Agriculture will release certain market-sensitive publications at 8:30 a.m. ET during a 1-year pilot test. Other market-sensitive USDA reports will continue to be released at 3:00 p.m. ET.

During the trial period of May 1, 1994, through April 30, 1995, all Grain Stocks and Rice Stocks reports issued by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) as well as the Acreage, Prospective Plantings, Small Grains Summary, Crop Production Annual, and Wheat and Rye Seedings reports will be released at 8:30 a.m. ET. The September Grain Stocks and Small Grains Summary reports will be moved to September 30 to better implement the new schedule.

The monthly NASS Crop Production report and the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report issued by the World Agricultural Outlook Board (WAOB) will be released at 8:30 a.m. ET during May through November 1994. Cotton and citrus estimates will not be included in the 8:30 a.m. releases, but full versions of both reports including these commodities will be released at 3:00 p.m. All reports will be prepared in secured "lockup" facilities to assure data security.

The December 1994 and February through April 1995 Crop Production and World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates reports will continue to be released at 3:00 p.m. ET since they contain no new information on the U.S. production of grains and oilseeds.

In January 1995, the Crop Production report and a World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report for cotton will be issued at 3:00 p.m. ET. The tentative date is January 11, 1995. The next day, the full World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report will be issued at 8:30 a.m. ET along with the Crop Production Annual and other NASS reports. A full schedule of 8:30 a.m. reports follows.

Market Sensitive 8:30 a.m. ET Releases

Date	Report	Exceptions to 8:30 a.m. Release
5/10/94	Crop Production WASDE*	Cotton and citrus at 3:00 p.m. ET Cotton at 3:00 p.m. ET
6/9/94	Crop Production WASDE	Citrus at 3:00 p.m. ET Cotton at 3:00 p.m. ET
6/30/94	Acreage Grain Stocks	
7/12/94	Crop Production WASDE	Cotton and citrus at 3:00 p.m. ET Cotton at 3:00 p.m. ET
8/11/94	Crop Production WASDE	Cotton at 3:00 p.m. ET Cotton at 3:00 p.m. ET
8/31/94	Rice Stocks	
9/12/94	Crop Production WASDE	Cotton and citrus at 3:00 p.m. ET Cotton at 3:00 p.m. ET
9/30/94	Small Grain Summary Grain Stocks	
10/12/94	Crop Production WASDE	Cotton and citrus at 3:00 p.m. ET Cotton at 3:00 p.m. ET
10/31/94	Rice Stocks	
11/9/94	Crop Production WASDE	Cotton and citrus at 3:00 p.m. ET Cotton at 3:00 p.m. ET
1/12/95**	Crop Production Annual	Cotton and citrus at 3:00 p.m. ET
1/11/95	Winter Wheat and Rye Seedings Grain Stocks Rice Stocks WASDE	Cotton at 3:00 p.m. ET
3/31/95	Grain Stocks Rice Stocks Prospective Plantings	

* World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates.

** Release dates for 1995 are tentative.

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Features-

Release No. 0188.94

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A New Agricultural Product

LESQUERELLA: GLOBAL RETHINKING OF RENEWABLE RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, March 7 -- If all goes according to plan, expect to see lesquerella -- a desert shrub native to the American Southwest -- transformed into an important ingredient in everything from high-performance specialty plastics, industrial nylons, and lubricants to high-priced cosmetics.

The lesquerella seed produces a vegetable oil. Dr. Keith Walker, director of development for the Agrigenetics Company of San Diego, Calif., says lesquerella's commercial prospects are promising. "The things that bode well for vegetable oils as industrial products are the global rethinking of the role of renewable resources and the interest in so-called 'environmentally friendly products.' These trends mean that a new product may not be economically viable now, but very soon it could become viable due to environmental and political changes."

Agrigenetics is so upbeat about lesquerella's future that it is spearheading a consortium designed to replace the \$30 million worth of imported castor oil with domestically produced lesquerella oil as quickly as possible.

To support this effort, the Alternative Agriculture Research and Commercialization (AARC) Center, a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is investing \$500,000 to speed development of lesquerella. The Center funds projects that will expand industrial and commercial uses of agricultural and forest products. This investment will be repaid with interest once lesquerella oil production is commercialized.

Agrigenetics plans to invest an additional \$267,00 and other partners have pledged over \$1 million. Previous Agrigenetics research established that lesquerella seed, grown and processed with standard equipment, produces specialty oils containing commercially valuable hydroxy fatty acids. The current project focuses on domesticating wild lesquerella to raise its yield of both seed and high-quality oil.

Lesquerella offers environmental and economic benefits including new products made from a domestic renewable resource and an alternative crop for farmers that requires less water than traditional crops such as cotton.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: *An 8 x 10, black and white, glossy print of the photograph is available from Photography Center, OPA, Room 4425-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone: (202) 720-4022. Request by negative number.*

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Release No. 0194.94

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A New Agricultural Product

GRASS MATS GROW NEW JOBS FOR RURAL AMERICA

WASHINGTON, March 8 -- What happens when you take 50,000 acres of kenaf and add grass seed and ingenuity?

The expected result is the creation of 46 new jobs in a rural community and the environmental benefits associated with finding new uses for soil-protecting, renewable agricultural products. Kenaf is an ancient fiber crop now grown in the southern and western states.

The new McCarthy Farms roll and grow kenaf grass mat developed by Agro-Fibers, Inc. of Corcoran, Calif., offers an economical way to create a new lawn -- in some cases saving the consumer 40 percent or more over traditional seeding methods. The mat is entirely biodegradable and helps fertilize the grass seed as it grows. It also reduces the amount of water required to start a lawn.

The combination of job creation and environmental benefits naturally attracted the interest of the new Alternative Agriculture Research and Commercialization (AARC) Center, a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Center funds projects that will expand industrial and commercial uses of agricultural and forest products.

Typical of the generally small entrepreneurial firms picked by the Center for the initial awards of \$10 million, Agro-Fibers is in line to receive an \$800,000 investment of AARC Center money. In return, the company will be combining new ideas, new technology, and a new commercial crop in ways designed both to generate rural jobs and to improve the environment. If sales of the new kenaf grass mats develop as rapidly as planned, the investment should be fully repaid with interest within two to three years.

The number of new production plants -- and the number of new jobs -- will depend on consumer demand. Early interest in the product suggests that the initial plant employing 46 people will be the first of many. The company expects to carve out an estimated \$50-million niche in the multi-billion dollar home gardening industry. The greater this niche turns out to be, the greater will be the environmental benefits from turning waste forest fibers and soil-saving kenaf, grown without chemicals, into a high-value commercial product.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: A black and white photograph of a USDA scientist examining a kenaf crop growing in Texas is available from Photography Center, OPA, Room 4425-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone: (202) 720-4022. Request photo number 88BW1573-12A.

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Release No. 0196.94
Larry Mark (202) 720-3310
Susan Conley (202) 720-5025

USDA'S MEAT AND POULTRY HOTLINE OFFERS ADVICE FOR ST. PATRICK'S CORNED BEEF DINNERS

WASHINGTON, March 8--Finally, March has arrived with hopes of spring soon behind. March for USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline means St. Patrick's Day celebrations across the country will spark many questions about safe handling and preparation of corned beef and cabbage.

Why corned beef on St. Patrick's Day? That's a story in itself. When most people are asked why they prepare corned beef and cabbage on March 17, the answer usually is, "because that's what you always serve on St. Patrick's Day. It's tradition."

Just as Thanksgiving is associated with turkey, so is corned beef and cabbage with St. Patrick's Day.

But how this "tradition" started is unclear.

"What is clear is that corned beef has nothing to do with corn," says Susan Conley, Director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline. "Corned beef got its name in Anglo-Saxon times when coarse 'corns of salt' were used to process the meat.

"Originally meat was preserved by dry salting," explained Conley, "but as brining took the place of salting, the term 'corned beef' still held. We usually say 'corned beef' instead of brined or pickled beef."

Whatever its origins, corned beef has generated a number of calls on the Hotline. One of the most often asked questions is how long it can be kept in the refrigerator or freezer.

Some packages may display a "sell-by" or "use-by" date, Conley said. Products with a "use-by" date can be stored unopened in the refrigerator until that time. "We advise callers that corned beef products without a date or with a 'sell-by' date can be kept in the refrigerator for up to a week after purchase, or up to a month in the freezer," says Conley. "For best results, buy your corned beef as close to St. Patrick's Day as possible."

What happens if the corned beef is kept in the freezer for more than a month. Is it still safe? Conley says the answer is "yes," but that longer freezing could lead to quality loss.

As for the spices used to flavor the beef these days, Conley says that will depend on the processor and the section of the country someone lives in. The most commonly used spices, however, are peppercorn and bay leaf.

Another often-asked question: What cuts of meat are used for corned beef? Corned beef is made from one of several less-tender beef cuts like the brisket, rump and round. Therefore, it requires long, moist cooking.

Keep food safety in mind when preparing the corned beef. Corned beef can be cooked on top of the range along with the favored cabbage and potatoes; in a slow cooker; in the oven; or started in the microwave and finished up in the oven.

Remember, set the oven temperature no lower than 325 F to start. Just barely cover the meat with water and keep the dish or pot covered throughout cooking. Juices should bubble slightly, but not boil.

The meat should cook for one hour per pound either in the oven or on the range; longer in a slow cooker.

A number of callers are also concerned about how to know when cooked corned beef is ready to eat. "Fork-tender is a good indication, but to be sure, use a meat thermometer," advises Conley, "and cook until the internal temperature has reached at least 160 F. Then you will know that you have safely prepared the meat."

Still other callers to the Hotline ask why corned beef is still pink in color after cooking. "That's because the meat is cured with nitrite, which fixes the meat pigments, and sometimes affects the meat color," says Conley.

Consumers who would like more information about corned beef and other meat and poultry products, should call the toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. In the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area, the number is (202) 720-3333.



Release No. 0208.94

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A New Agricultural Product

KENAF REVIVAL COULD LAUNCH TEXAS NEWSPRINT INDUSTRY

WASHINGTON, March 11 -- One of the world's oldest fiber crops -- kenaf -- could become a major source of the "newsprint" paper used for newspapers. Since more than half of the nation's newsprint is currently imported, adding about \$3.8 billion to the U.S. trade deficit each year, kenaf newsprint could save both trees and money.

Drawing on more than 20 years of active U.S. research into kenaf production methods and potential markets for this annual, hot-climate crop, Kenaf International of McAllen, Texas now plans to build a \$50-million paper mill designed to produce 30,000 tons of newsprint per year.

After repeated commercial-scale tests, kenaf is acknowledged as a cost-competitive source of newsprint. Compared with wood-pulp paper, research shows kenaf paper as stronger, whiter, less yellowing, capable of sharper photo reproduction, and more user-friendly due to better ink adherence (thus requiring less ink and resulting in less ink ruboff on readers' hands).

The proposed plant is designed to produce newsprint from a mix of kenaf and recycled newspapers, with the ratio varied depending on the availability of the two components.

Kenaf International General Manager Charles Taylor says kenaf newsprint pays dividends both economically and environmentally. A tree-free paper that requires relatively minimal chemical inputs in either field or mill operations reduces both costs and environmental concerns," he said. "Energy consumption is 15 to 25 percent lower for kenaf than that required to pulp southern pine . . . and the treated waste water can be used to irrigate nearby fiber crops." Another plus is that in field trials in the southeast U.S., kenaf has yielded three to five times more fiber per acre per year than southern pine.

The Alternative Agriculture Research and Commercialization Center, a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is investing a repayable \$100,000 to help Kenaf International prepare materials for a project financing plan for presentation to potential investors and lenders. The Center funds projects that will expand industrial and commercial uses of agricultural and forest products.

Supplying the proposed newsprint plant would provide a steady market to grow kenaf on far greater acreage for the 25 Texas farmers who are now growing it on only 3,000 acres for research and limited marketing purposes.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: An 8 x 10, black and white, glossy print of the photograph is available from Photography Center, OPA, Room 4425-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone: (202) 720-4022. Request by negative number.

